

c) at least one third step c) in which at least a portion of the hydrogen sulphide-partially depleted effluent from step b) and hydrogen are passed over a catalyst disposed in a fixed bed comprising, on a mineral support, at least one metal or compound of a metal from group VI B of the periodic table in a quantity, expressed as the weight of the metal with respect to the weight of the finished catalyst, of about 0.5% to 40%, at least one non noble metal or compound of a non noble metal from group VIII of said periodic table, in a quantity, expressed as the weight of the metal with respect to the weight of the finished catalyst, of about 0.1% to 30%, wherein the quantity of catalyst used in the first step is about 5% to about 40% by weight of the total quantity of catalyst used in said process.

2. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the quantity of catalyst used in the first step is about 10% to about 40% of the total quantity of catalyst used in said process.

3. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein step b) for recovering a gas fraction at least a portion of the hydrogen sulphide contained in the total effluent from step a) is carried out by stripping using at least one hydrogen-containing gas at a pressure substantially identical to that prevailing in the first step and at a temperature of about 100°C to about 450°C under conditions such that a gaseous stripping effluent containing hydrogen and hydrogen sulphide is formed along with a liquid feed that is depleted in hydrogen sulphide.

4. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein step b) for recovering a gas fraction containing a portion of the hydrogen sulphide contained in the total fraction contained in the total effluent from step a) is carried out by flashing the total effluent from step a).

5. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the operating conditions for step a) comprise a temperature of about 240 °C to about 420 °C, a total pressure of about 2 MPa to about 20 MPa and an hourly space velocity of liquid feed of about 0.1 to about 5 and that of step c) comprises a temperature of about 240 °C to about 420 °C, a total pressure of about 2MPa to about 20 MPa and an hourly space velocity of liquid feed of at most equal to approximately the hourly space velocity of liquid feed in step a).

6. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalyst used in step a) and that used in step c) each comprise at least one metal or compound of a metal from group VIB selected from the group consisting of molybdenum and tungsten and at least one metal or a compound of a metal from group VIII selected from the group consisting of nickel, cobalt and iron.

7. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalyst used in step a) and that used in step c) each comprise molybdenum or a compound of molybdenum in a quantity, expressed as the weight of metal with respect to the weight of finished catalyst, of about 2% to 30%, and at least one of a metal or at least one of a compound of a metal from the group consisting of nickel and cobalt in a quantity, expressed as the weight of metal with respect to the weight of the finished catalyst, of about 0.5% to 15%.

8. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalyst used in step a) and that used in step c) each comprise nickel as the group VIII metal, and molybdenum as the group VIB metal.

9. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalyst used in step a) and that used in step c) each further comprise at least one element selected from the group consisting of silicon, phosphorous and boron or one or more compounds of said elements.

10. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the support for the catalysts used in step a) and in step c) are selected independently from the group consisting of alumina, silica, silica-aluminas, zeolites, magnesia, titanium oxide TiO_2 and mixtures thereof.

11. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalysts used in step a) and in step c) each comprise at least one halogen.

12. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalysts used in step a) and in step c) each comprise a quantity of halogen of about 0.1% to about 15% by weight with respect to the weight of the finished catalyst.

13. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalysts used in step a) and in step c) each comprise at least one halogen selected from the group consisting of chlorine and fluorine.

14. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalysts used in step a) and in step c) each comprise chlorine and fluorine.

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15. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, further comprising passing the gas fraction recovered in step b) containing hydrogen sulphide to zone wherein at least a portion of the hydrogen sulphide is eliminated and, from which a zone purified hydrogen is recovered and is recycled to the first hydrodesulphurization step a).

Please ~~ADD~~ the following new claims:

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--16. The process according to claim 2, wherein the quantity of catalyst used in the first hydrodesulfurization step is about 15% to about 30% by weight of the total quantity of catalyst used in the process.

17. The process according to claim 1, wherein the catalyst support is selected from the group consisting of: alumina, silica, silica-alumina, zeolite, magnesia, titanium oxide, and mixtures thereof.

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18. The process according to claim 5, wherein said temperature is in the range of about 260 °C to 400 °C.

19. The process according to claim 18, wherein said temperature is in the range of about 280 °C to 390 °C.

20. The process according to claim 5, wherein said total pressure is in the range of 2MPa to 10 MPa. --